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ABSTRACT

This booklet is designed to help prospective students, counselors, public agencies, and institutions better understand home study school accreditation. Home study is also known as correspondence or independent study; and most home study is provided by proprietary schools. Because of the student's and the public's need to determine the quality of various educational institutions offering home study, an Accrediting Commission was established by the National Home Study Council (NHSC) in 1955. It was recognized by the U.S. Office of Education in 1959. The Commission is made up of nine members who represent the public. Basically accreditation means that the school voluntarily undergoes a comprehensive study to certify that the school meets NHSC standards, performs the functions it claims it does, has stated educational objectives, and furnishes materials/services to enable students to meet objectives. The steps in accreditation involve application, submission of a self evaluation report, subject specialist review, examination by committee, and an information survey. Finally the commission reviews the information and takes one of four courses: accredits the school, accredits with stipulations, defers a decision, or denies accreditation. Accredited schools submit yearly reports and are reviewed every five years. There are many benefits of accreditation; for example, the public can rely on the accredited status of a school as an index of quality. (CSS)

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Home Study School Accreditation

Each year an estimated 3 to 4 million Americans pursue education or training through what is known as home study. Home study education, which is also known as correspondence study, independent study, and by a variety of other terms, has existed in America for nearly 100 years. Yet, few teachers, counselors, students and prospective students have more than a vague idea about home study. Even fewer people understand the meaning and purpose of accreditation.

Today an estimated 500 or more institutions offer home study programs, and while many programs are worthwhile, some are not. This booklet is designed to help prospective students, counselors, public agencies and institutions better understand home study school accreditation and how the accreditation procedures of the Accrediting Commission of the National Home Study Council work. Hopefully, this booklet will answer many of the questions raised about home study school accreditation.

What is Home Study?

Home study is enrollment and study with an educational institution which provides lesson materials prepared in a sequential and logical order for study by a student on his own. When each lesson is completed, the student mails the assigned work to the school for correction, grading, comment, and subject matter guidance by qualified teachers. Corrected assignments are returned immediately to the student. This exchange provides for a personalized student-teacher relationship.

Home study courses vary greatly in scope, level and length. Some have a few lessons and require only weeks to complete while others have a hundred or more assignments requiring three or four years of conscientious study.

What is the Background of Home Study Accreditation?

A student planning to enroll in an educational institution wants to know something of the quality of that institution. Most schools do just what their advertising and promotional literature claim they can do. Some few do not.

How can a serious student tell which is which? The United States has rejected the idea of centralized governmental control over educational systems and has instead adopted a system of voluntary accreditation.

Well over half a century ago both educators and the public began to realize that significant differences existed within the same general class of educational institutions. This realization resulted in the growth of accrediting bodies which used the judgment of peers as a measure of educational quality.

During the early part of this century, several of the leading figures in home study education realized that problems existed in the home study field. After a special Carnegie Corporation study in the mid-twenties verified their analysis, they decided that the time had come for establishing standards for ethical schools to follow.

The National Home Study Council was organized in 1926 as a voluntary association of home study schools to

promote "sound educational standards and ethical business practices within the home study field."

In 1952, the Council decided further improvements should be made in the procedures used to examine and approve home study schools. A system of accreditation seemed the best solution. As the planning progressed, the Council was assisted by individuals in the U.S. Office of Education, the National Commission on Accrediting, and other accrediting associations.

The NHSC's independent, Accrediting Commission was established in 1955. Four years later the Commission was listed by the U.S. Office of Education as a "nationally recognized accrediting agency" under the terms of Public Law. The procedures and standards have been continuously refined and improved over the past twenty years.

The official recognition of the Commission by the U.S. Office of Education has been reviewed periodically since 1955 following extensive reevaluations of its activities and procedures.

In 1973, the Commission received the recognition of the National Commission on Accrediting and became the first agency accrediting private schools—most of them proprietary—to receive such recognition. In 1975, the Accrediting Commission became a charter member of the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation, a nongovernmental body recognizing and coordinating the activities of accrediting agencies throughout the United States.

Today, the Accrediting Commission is recognized as the accrediting body for both private and non-private correspondence institutions.

Who are the Accrediting Commissioners?

Instruction through home study is a vastly different art than instruction via the "traditional" classroom method. Because of this, it is important that some members of the Accrediting Commission have an in-depth knowledge of correspondence schools. On the other hand, because accreditation is a public trust, it is vital that public members provide the objectivity and impartiality that such a trust demands. The membership of the Accrediting Commission of the National Home Study Council consists of four senior executives of accredited home study schools and five Commissioners who represent the public. In fact, the Accrediting Commission is the only nationally recognized accrediting agency which has a majority of public members.

What are the Purposes and Functions of Accreditation?

The word accreditation has acquired many shades of meaning over the years. Simply stated, home study school accreditation is certification by a recognized body that a school has voluntarily undergone a comprehensive study and examination which has demonstrated that the school does in fact perform the functions that it claims: that the school has set educational objectives for students who enroll, and furnishes materials and services that enable students to meet these stated objectives.

Home study school accreditation is institutional in nature and is based upon a method of instruction rather than educational level or subject matter discipline. It covers all programs, courses and home study endeavors of

a school. Unlike regional or specialized accrediting agencies, the Accrediting Commission of the National Home Study Council provides home study institutions with a single source of national recognition. The scope of the Accrediting Commission does not extend to academic degrees.

Most experts agree that accreditation is a "process whereby an association or agency grants public recognition to an institution or program as having met certain established qualifications or standards as determined through initial and periodic evaluations. Increasingly, accreditation also infers stimulation toward improvement beyond the minimum standards specified by the accrediting body."

Historically and currently accreditation may be said to:

- foster excellence in education through the development of standards for assessing educational effectiveness;
- encourage improvement through continuous self evaluation and planning;
- assure the educational community, the general public, and other agencies or organizations that an institution has both clearly defined and appropriate objectives, maintains conditions under which their achievement can be reasonably expected, appears in fact to be accomplishing them, and can be expected to continue to do so.

What are NHSC Standards for Accreditation?

The fact that a home study school is accredited means that the NHSC's independent Accrediting Commission has determined that the school offers quality instruction and meets the standards established by the Commission. The standards require that a school:

- state its educational objectives clearly
- offer sufficiently comprehensive, accurate, up-to-date, educationally sound instructional materials and methods to meet these announced objectives
- provide adequate examination services, encouragement to students, and attention to individual differences
- have a qualified faculty
- enroll only students who can be expected to benefit from the instruction
- maintain adequate student services
- show satisfactory student progress and success
- be honest in its advertising and promotional materials
- carefully select, train, and supervise its field representatives
- show financial resources adequate to carry out all obligations to students
- use reasonable tuition collection methods and have a satisfactory refund policy
- maintain student records properly
- demonstrate a satisfactory period of ethical operation

Furthermore, the accreditation process must be repeated at intervals of not more than five years.

Which Schools are Eligible for Home Study Accreditation?

Application for accreditation from the Accrediting Commission of the National Home Study Council may be made at any time by any private or non-private bona fide correspondence institution with two years of operating experience.

(continued on page 5)

PUBLIC MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION

Dr. Fred F. Harcleroad, Commission Chairman; Professor and Director of Higher Education, University of Arizona.

G. Dewey Arnold, Senior Partner of Price Waterhouse & Co.; Trustee, Greater Washington Educational Television Association; Board of Directors, Metropolitan Washington Board of Trad-

Dr. S. Norman Feingold, National Director, B'nai B'rith Career and Counseling Services; Past President, American Personnel and Guidance Association.

Dr. John D. Phillips, President, National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities; Former Deputy Commissioner for Postsecondary Education, U.S. Office of Education.

Dr. Harold P. Rodes, President, General Motors Institute (1960–1976); Former President, Bradley University and Ohio College of Applied Science.

SCHOOL MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION

James E. Godfrey, President, Truck Marketing Institute

Colonel Marvin E. Grunzke, Commandant, U.S. Air Force Extension Course Institute

Calvin R. Hemphill, Executive Director, Hemphill Schools

John F. Thompson, President, McGraw-Hill Continuing Education Center

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The Accrediting Commission is aided in its decisions by the extensive work done before a Commission meeting. The process of accreditation begins when a school submits an application to the Commission's Washington office. Here a determination is made of the school's eligibility on two points—(1) whether it has been in actual operation for a period of two consecutive years immediately prior to accreditation (the two year period begins with the date of the first enrollment) and (2) whether the applicant is in fact a correspondence school (defined as one which teaches students through the exchange of printed materials and written examinations, which employs qualified faculty members, and which provides student services). Institu-

tions interested in seeking accreditation should write to the Executive Secretary of the Accrediting Commission.

How Does Accreditation Work?

The steps in the accrediting process are these:

Application

Since accreditation is a voluntary process, each school must make its own choice: to seek accreditation or not. If the school desires to become accredited, this desire must be shown by formal application to the Accrediting Commission. Application is the beginning of the chain of events that is required to bring about a total analysis and evaluation of the school: its policies, procedures, philosophies, objectives, functions, and accomplishments.

Submission of a Self Evaluation Report

The application is acknowledged and the school begins preparation of a Self Evaluation Report. The preparation of this report may take from two to four months in a small institution and three to nine months in a large, complex one.

During the self evaluation, the school studies itself. The study includes the gathering and analysis of pertinent data on all aspects of the school and its work.

The thorough going-over a school must give itself is reflected in the titles of the Self Evaluation Report's subdivisions: "organization," "educational objectives," "educational materials and services," "qualifications of faculty," "student success and satisfaction," "admission practices and enrollment agreements," "advertising, promotion and sales," "financial responsibility," "tuition policies," "plant and equipment," and "research and self-improvement."

After the questions in all subdivisions are answered, the report should reveal the school's philosophy, organizational structure, specific practices and procedures, as well as success of its different operations and the degree to which it is accomplishing its stated objectives.

The Self Evaluation process not only provides data on current operations, but also provides the opportunity for self-improvement. When the Self Evaluation Report is completed, several copies are forwarded to the Accrediting Commission.

The Subject Specialist Review

With the Self Evaluation Report, the Commission requires copies of each of the courses offered by the school. These are given to qualified subject matter specialists. Highly qualified professionals, these individuals are usually practitioners in their fields or instructors in institutions of higher education. These specialists review the courses and evaluate them to determine whether the objectives announced by the school can be accomplished by the course. The texts and study guides are checked to make certain that they are complete, up-to-date, and accurate in content. Any instructional aids, including visuals, tools, laboratory equipment, and devices and "kits" are evaluated to determine if they are relevant and worthwhile learning experiences.

Each subject specialist submits to the Accrediting Commission a confidential and comprehensive report on the course reviewed.

The Examining Committee

In addition to requiring submission of the Self Evaluation Report and the review of the courses, an examining committee is assigned to visit the school. A mutually convenient date is

selected for the visit. The examining committee is not limited in size, but always includes a chairman, a home study education specialist, a home study business management specialist, subject specialists for each course area (who may or may not visit the school) and an observer for the Accrediting Commission.

This committee visits the school and studies its entire operation in order to verify the information in the Self Evaluation Report and to gather additional facts for the Accrediting Commission. Although designed as a fact finding process, the visit may also stimulate ideas for improvement of the applicant school.

In those cases where resident training is provided as a required or an optional part of a correspondence course, the training facilities are examined to make sure that resident training outcomes contribute to the total course objectives.

Following the visit of the examining committee, each of the committee members reports his findings to the chairman. The individual reports are confidential, objective, and factual. From them the chairman develops a chairman's report to describe the findings of the committee. This report includes the applicant school's areas of strength and weakness and its degree of compliance with the standards. It is confined to presentation of factual findings; no recommendation of action by the Accrediting Commission is included. The school is then given the opportunity to review the chairman's report and submit additional materials in response to the report.

Additional Information Survey

To obtain further information not covered in the factual material furnished by the school and submitted by the examiners, the Commission conducts a wide-ranged survey to demonstrate the reliability, integrity, and reputation of each school. This is done through contacting literally thousands of agencies, including state departments of education, federal agencies such as the Veterans Administration, the Federal Trade Commission, and the U.S. Office of Education, states attorneys general, Better Business Bureaus, Chambers of Commerce, and other official bodies to discover whether public needs are being served fairly.

In addition, students, whose names are randomly selected, are surveyed to get their opinions as well.

Commission Action

The Accrediting Commission meets at least twice each year to review the information assembled on applicant schools. The Commission has four courses of action which it may take on each application:

- accredit a new applicant school or continue an institution's accredited status
- accredit or continue accreditation with stipulations that must be met within a stated time period.
- defer a decision pending progress reports, additional evidence, or a statement of the school's plan for improvement, any of which may require a supplemental visit
- deny accreditation or remove accreditation from an institution.

If accreditation is denied, the Commission sends the school a statement of the reasons for the denial and the school may appeal the action. The Commission will hear the appeal at the earliest practical time.

All judgments of the Accrediting Commission are final. They are not subject to review or veto by the Na-

tional Home Study Council's members, officers, or Board of Trustees.

What are the Responsibilities of Accredited Schools?

An accredited school must conform to all educational and business standards, must submit annual reports to the Accrediting Commission, and must be re-examined completely at least every five years. However, the Commission may call for periodic or special reports from any accredited school and may call for a re-examination in less than five years if there is a change in ownership or management or if there is evidence of serious problems in the school.

What are the Benefits of Accreditation?

Throughout the past two decades, accredited home study schools have been the leaders in the field of correspondence study. Some of the major benefits of accreditation for home study schools include:

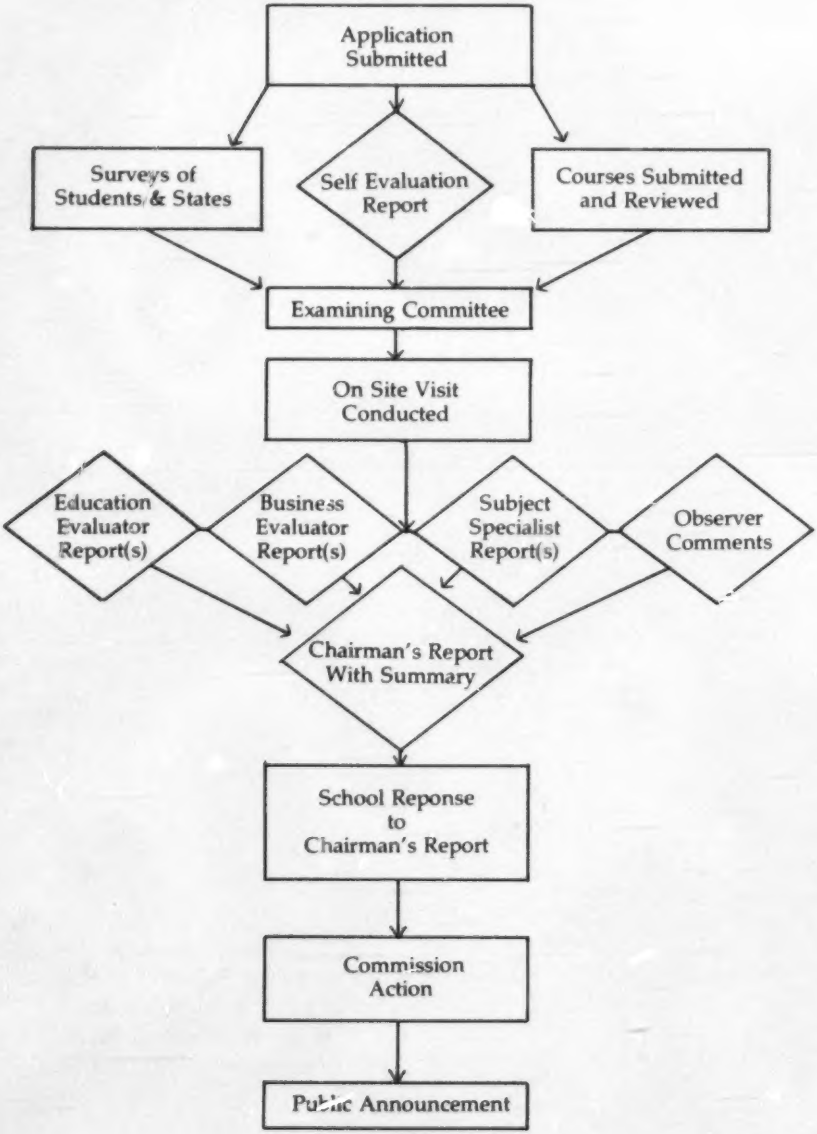
- Reliance by counselors, employers, educators, governmental officials, and the public on the accredited status of a school as a reliable index of quality.
- An expression of confidence in the policies and procedures of the school by its peers—a lasting source of pride for the school.
- An external source of stimulation to improve services, programs, and staff through periodic evaluations by an outside agency and self-study.
- Assurance of high standards and educational quality through the adherence to established criteria, policies and standards.
- Some recognition of status by certain states under legislation and regulation as well as recognition given by federal, state and local agencies in referring students to accredited schools.
- The benefits and opportunities given to accredited schools by federal law such as student loan acts, and by federal agencies, such as the Veterans Administration.
- The listing of the school and its courses in the *Directory of Accredited Home Study Schools.*
- The listing of the school along with other higher education institutions in the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation directory. *Accredited Institutions on Postsecondary Education,* distributed by the American Council on Education.
- The use of the NHSC seal and reference to accreditation by the Accrediting Commission.
- Students qualify for tuition reimbursement under several industry plans requiring enrollment with only accredited schools.
- Eligibility for participation in the academic credit evaluation procedure conducted by the Office on Educational Credit of the American Council on Education.
- It expedites acceptance of school advertising by newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations and other advertising media.
- The opportunity to serve on accrediting examining committees visiting other schools.

How Can One Get a List of Accredited Home Study Schools?

A "Directory of Accredited Home Study Schools" is published by the Accrediting Commission and distributed to the public. Copies of the directory are available without charge. Send a postcard to:

Accrediting Commission of the
National Home Study Council
1601 18th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20009

THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS: FLOWCHART OF STEPS



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